



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

August 1, 2003

Jefferson County Board of Health
615 Sheridan Street
Port Townsend, WA 98368

Dear Chair Masci,

Thank you and the other members of your board of health for allowing Don Sloma and me to come before you recently to learn more about your priority areas of concern.

We heard three primary areas of concern during our visit: the dumping of gray and black water from cruise ships into Puget Sound waters within Jefferson County; enforcement authority and resources for on-site sewage rules and for other environmental health programs; and medical service access disparities.

We found the discussion about cruise ship dumping to be most animated and enlightening as you and your fellow board members and staff shared the results of your investigations. All of the issues you raised, including the adequacy of training, the adequacy of existing federal policy and procedures for cruise ships and the consistency of local, state and federal programs for the regulation of sewage on land, on small pleasure craft and on commercial vessels bear further discussion. We look forward to further communication from you on these subjects. I can assure you, this is an item I will raise for the state board's consideration. I hope to have some specific answers for you in the coming months about some of the questions you raised, as well as a determination by the state board of their willingness to pursue this subject in further detail.

We heard your board's concern about increasing demands and declining resources for public health infrastructure in your community to perform even routine monitoring and enforcement of long stand public health programs such as on-site sewage regulation. This is a recurrent theme in our meetings with local boards of health this year, together with the lack of capacity across our state's public health system to pursue emerging threats to public health from the environment. It is part of the larger issue often raised about the absence in our state of an adequate, stable financing base for public health. Our discussion with your board leads me to wonder about the need for a higher priority in state public health financing discussions on environmental health infrastructure. Thank you for sharing your insights.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the excellent points made at the end of our discussion by your Administrator, Jean Baldwin, regarding the growing medical care access disparities in rural areas. Her comments about unmet needs for alcohol and mental health treatment, as well as the concerns she expressed about the continued financial viability of primary medical care and even some hospital care in rural areas are well taken. The board views with alarm the state's apparent

determination this year that subsidies for access to needed medical care for the poor and other minorities was not of sufficient priority for government to continue them at historic levels in our current economic climate. Her comments served to strengthen our resolve to continue speaking out on this important public health issue.

Our meeting with your board was very helpful to our ongoing efforts to learn more about community perspectives on public health issues. As I mentioned during our discussion, we intend to use the information we receive from you and other Boards of Health in our 2004 State Health Report. By law, the state Board must produce this report biennially, together with recommendations for state health priorities for the ensuing biennium. Although we distributed copies of the 2002 State Health Report at our meeting, you may also view that report on our web page at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Pubs/2002SHR.pdf>

If you would like to provide additional information, other community perspectives or other suggestions for statewide health priorities, please feel free to call or write. We will be accepting additional input from local boards of health for the state health report until September 30, 2003. We are open to hearing from you about emerging issues at any time.

If you have any further questions or requests, please call the Board office at (360) 236-4110 and one of our staff would be happy to assist you in anyway possible.

Again, thank you for allowing us some time with you in your busy schedules.

Sincerely,

Carl Osaki, Member
Washington State Board of Health

Cc: Jefferson County Board of Health Members
Jean Baldwin, Jefferson County Health and Social Services Department
Washington State Board of Health Members
Don Sloma, Executive Director, State Board of Health